

LANE COVE COUNCIL
Discussion Paper
Sustainable Cities 2025: A Blueprint for the Future

Many global challenges have their roots in local activities. Therefore, local government is often best positioned to implement actions towards sustainability. Not only does ESD manifest itself in Local Government legislation and policies, but also it is often the role of Local Government to initiate and respond to the challenges faced by expanding cities.

This discussion paper sets an important agenda for reaching sustainability, however it must be noted that with the expectations placed on Local Government to implement local action, adequate resources must be made available to encourage such activities.

The following submission is placed on behalf of Lane Cove Council, a local government area in northern Sydney, with a resident population in excess of 32 500 which is subject to pressures of urban consolidation, increasing use of private vehicles and increased consumption. Four of the seven objectives outlined in the Discussion Paper were identified to be particularly pertinent to the Lane Cove local area. They are:

3. *Establish an integrated sustainable water and stormwater management system addressing capture, consumption, treatment and re-use opportunities;*
5. *Develop sustainable transport networks, nodal complementarity and logistics;*
6. *Incorporate eco-efficiency principles into new buildings and housing; and*
7. *Provide urban plans that accommodate lifestyle and business opportunities.*

In preparing this submission, contributions from various staff members including planners and senior management were sought and are included throughout. The submission focuses on comments about each of the four selected objectives.

3. Sustainable Water Use.

It is essential that cities of the future look towards more localised systems for water management. As the Lane Cove area is the 12th highest water user per capita in Sydney, there is a challenge afoot to both conserve potable water and also to encourage and perhaps mandate alternative water management systems.

The manner in which this can be implemented on a local level is to be legislated by the NSW government in the BASIX programme to commence from 1st July 2004. It is hoped that this will support Lane Cove Council's encouragement of the use of rainwater tanks, in both new and existing developments. To engender such a change, it is essential that Council's rainwater tank policy be reviewed to ensure it aligns with recent changes to the State Environmental Planning Policy 46. Furthermore, Council's Codes for dwelling houses and other developments are being reviewed to comply with the BASIX requirements and promote such measures as the use of pervious paving systems to footpaths and driveways so as to reduce the speed and volume of overland flow, water-efficient shower-heads, toilets and other fixtures, planting native species in the garden etc.

With the mandatory water restrictions being in force as of November 2003, a higher emphasis is being placed on water use and reuse, as indicated by the level of inquiries at the Local Government level. The hope is that water restrictions will be in place permanently which will encourage a sense of local ownership of this national challenge.

A way in which water conservation could be encouraged further would be to include “water credits” or reduced water rates for those individuals and businesses that actively reduce water consumption and water wastage by any of the means discussed in this section.

Abandoning existing waste water systems to maximise use of greywater in residential and industrial settings is an area where the expertise currently lies with Sydney Water. However, Council has the opportunity to encourage such practice by developing a greywater tank policy in conjunction with the rainwater tank policy.

Currently, a small-scale treatment plant at Wetherill Park provides greywater for use at golf courses in Fairfield. This sort of activity is one that could be investigated by Lane Cove Council also.

In summary, the current practice of transporting highly treated potable water long distances for use on gardens and filling up pools is not the most efficient use of existing resources. Therefore any proposals to localise water management systems should be embraced by governments at all levels.

5. Sustainable Transport Networks

Whenever quizzed, Lane Cove residents raise as the major issue the level of vehicular traffic and its impacts on the local environment. Major traffic trunk roads such as Epping Road, Centennial Avenue and River Road not only create a physical barrier that separates the local community but the excessive amount of vehicles travelling on these roads are also a major source of pollution to the local environment. Congestion in the morning and afternoon peak hours results in virtual grid-lock around the Lane Cove Commercial Centre, increasing motorists’ frustration and anger, and increasing levels of pollution beyond acceptable limits.

It is anticipated that the Lane Cove Tunnel will alleviate some of the traffic volumes on Epping Road, but it is some 3-4 years away and traffic flow on this road will still be significant and combined with unfiltered stacks from the Tunnel will have continued implications for the local community.

Strategic planning for sustainable transport networks is required now if we are to alleviate this situation and provide a better and healthier future for everyone in the Lane Cove area. Current rates of growth for motor vehicle usage will simply result in the need for more or bigger roads.

Like most Local Government Authorities, Lane Cove Council is committed to supporting the provision of better public transport and infrastructure. This is seen as being the most likely way of decreasing dependency on motor vehicles. However, pressure has been placed on public transport authorities to provide services that are cash positive. This stance has led to either reduction in services, increases in fares or in some cases the complete abolition of the services. Whilst fares are high and services infrequent, it is uneconomical and difficult for the community to justify using public transport. The community will continue to choose the motor vehicle as its’ main mode of travel.

This culture is becoming increasingly ingrained in our society. The motor vehicle dependence is already increasing pressure on the existing road network and there are now plans for more roads, i.e. the F3 link to the M2, and renewed calls for the F6 extension from Sutherland to the Airport. This cycle will continue unabated with the government’s current stance on resolving the issue by constructing more roads to meet demand.

It is evident that a complete change in State Government strategy is required, and in the short-term. Greater emphasis must be placed on the motor vehicle subsidising public transport through additional taxes and levies. Although it is acknowledged that a percentage of taxes collected for

road use are required to maintain the existing road infrastructure, it is essential that a greater portion of these taxes contribute towards an improved public transport service.

The community must be provided with greater choice in making travel trips and encouraged to walk and cycle where possible, particularly with short trips. This will require a change in culture, where Australians have become increasingly Americanised and a significant dependence has developed for everyone to own an automobile. There is the perception that we are safe within our car's confines, where we have our own privacy and we can travel in air-conditioned comfort. Automobiles have also become a symbol of our success and status, with sections of the community intent on displaying their wealth through their choice of car.

But the insulation of the motor vehicle has led to people becoming unsociable. There is also an unhealthy edge developing in our society, particularly with our youth. For varying reasons, an increasing number of parents are taking their children to school by car.

Adoption by our schools of Travel Smart programs such as 'Walk to School', 'Cycle to School', and 'Think Before You Go' are paramount to reversing this trend. This will require both a cultural and lifestyle change within our society, but it can be done. People have to be willing to make the change and incentives are needed by our governments to promote this.

Lane Cove Council for its part is instituting a number of initiatives to promote a reduction in motor vehicle usage and a healthier lifestyle. Council is currently forming a working party to investigate sustainable strategies and actions as part of the LA21 process.

This includes a strategy to install directional signage providing information on walking/cycle distances and times to key points of interest. This strategy also requires an upgrade to Council's footpaths and cycle routes. This type of strategy is required on a more regional basis.

Council's Road Safety Officer is also investigating pilot Travel Smart strategies with the Lane Cove West Public School that if successful will be applied to other schools in the municipality. This is by no means the only transport solution to an ever-increasing traffic problem, but it is a start and Lane Cove considers that state and federal government commitment is required if Sydney is to achieve transport sustainability.

6. Eco-Efficiency Principles

Eco-efficiency design principles have been utilised in only a few properties in Lane Cove. Some of those who have done so have sought special compensations (for example – an increased floor/space ratio) to cover the extra costs of installing added eco-efficiency design principles. The following areas were identified as being those in which Council could encourage their integration into standard building practices;

- 1) Reuse of existing materials/recycled and energy efficient building materials
- 2) Orientation with respect to passive heating and cooling
- 3) Conservation of natural resources – e.g. use of rainwater tanks, solar panels
- 4) Appliances with high energy efficiency ratings
- 5) Onsite construction and demolition waste management

A demonstration and education component is essential to encourage this type of practice. Council could lead the way by installing solar panels on its leisure centre or community centre.

State and Local Government need to collaborate to drive eco-efficiency principles into mainstream building. It is hoped that the introduction of the State Government's BASIX program will assist Council to address sustainability issues in both strategic and assessment levels. The

NSW government should be encouraged to amend its proposed BASIX policy so as to allow councils' standards to exceed the BASIX minimums.

The incentives that could be used for new developments could include;

- Monetary; such as grants, tax concessions, rebates, discounts on Council rates/GST/stamp duty, increased tipping costs for high volumes of waste (i.e. a sliding scale).
- Houses that meet certain eco-efficiency standards could receive interest rate rebates.
- Legislative; in writing Local Environment Plans, such principles could become mandatory

Eco –efficiency principles have so many advantages to home owners and developers, although some of the areas may require additional up front capital, some are simply a rethink in design (for example reorienting the building so as to maximise northern facing outlooks). Council is in a position to implement some of the objectives as outlined in the discussion paper but can only do so with the assistance of other levels of government.

7. Urban Planning

Sydney has been an ad-hoc series of urban planning decisions ever since it was settled in 1788. Urban sprawl has resulted in the extremities of Sydney consuming the cities of Gosford, Wollongong and Campbelltown, and it appears with current planning strategies that the end is not in sight.

This type of urban planning is not sustainable. As urban sprawl continues unabated, more infrastructure is required to support a thinly spread population. It is essential that greater thought be given to urban planning that centres populations around commercial centres, transport, health and education nodes.

Lane Cove Council is attempting to meet this challenge by giving greater consideration to shoptop housing in the Lane Cove Commercial Centre and increasing housing densities along the truck traffic route corridors.

It is important that other factors are also considered in urban planning. The community's awareness of utilising renewable energy and the need for development to be more self-sustaining is increasing. Lane Cove Council is currently updating its policy with respect to rainwater and greywater reuse, but believes that state and federal governments need to be supportive and assist by way of incentives. Likewise, the use of solar energy is another means of assisting in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and making households more self-sustainable. Unfortunately, the state government has recently reduced the rebates available for solar energy systems, and this will only discourage greater use.

Although financial incentives will help kick-start this type of program, it is anticipated that as more people utilise solar energy technology, costs will decrease and government rebates will become less essential.

The current Review of Section 94 developer contributions (under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act) in NSW should investigate the potential for increased partnerships between local and state government for infrastructure provision in the above areas of water management, public transport and other environmental protection measures.

To assist this process, it is recommended that an expanded and coordinated data-base be held by infrastructure providers to identify more specifically the levels of usage attributed to each household. The goal should be an ongoing monitoring of the relationship between development and its impacts, and ultimately a re-education of public expectations about the need for growth levels to be contained within environmental capacity.

Environmental capacity should be the starting-point for planning. Only development which can be accommodated within that environmental capacity should be permitted. The responsibilities of developers should be considered, equally with their rights. Sustainable cities will not be achieved unless public authorities (i) take responsibility for monitoring the cumulative impact of developments, and (ii) introduce effective policies and strategies for balancing the public demand for growth with that capacity.

Social sustainability requires that growth, within the permissible level, is equitably distributed to minimise disadvantage between competing community sectors.

Council supports the Triple Bottom Line concept of sustainability which seeks to balance environmental, social and economic needs of the community. Public consultation is vital to encourage transparency in the process of determining this balance.